

# AccessLetter

Cambridge Commission for  
Persons with Disabilities

## TRAVEL AND RECREATION ISSUE

### Outdoor Adventures for People of All Abilities

Outdoor Explorations (OE), a Medford-based non-profit organization with ten years' experience providing outdoor adventure programs for people with and without disabilities, offers a full slate of trips for anyone looking to have fun. OE serves individuals in the Greater Boston area and runs educational adventure trips, including kayaking, backpacking, whitewater rafting, sailing, cycling, and snowshoeing programs, throughout New England. Participants include people with physical, emotional, and cognitive disabilities as well as people without disabilities.



Try a cycling clinic in Wompatuck State Park or a kayaking trip to Cape Cod. Spend a day sailing in Boston harbor or join a group of women on a four-day sea-kayaking

tour in Maine. If you have young kids, come out for a weekend camping adventure at Harold Parker State Forest in Andover or sign up for an Adventure Day program where your family will explore the ecology of the forest and pond at Hale Reservation in Westwood. There are plenty of options for teenagers as well with the Adventures in Leadership programs, which challenge youth of all abilities with one-day and multi-day programs throughout the summer. With over 45 programs to choose from, there's something for everyone!

OE provides accessible transportation from their office in Medford with pick-ups at convenient MBTA locations. All meals and equipment are provided. To sign up, or to request a program catalog call OE at 781-395-4999, email: [info@outdoorexplorations.org](mailto:info@outdoorexplorations.org), or go online: [www.outdoorexplorations.org](http://www.outdoorexplorations.org).

### Mexico on Wheels

Three months after my company laid me off, I went to Mexico, lived with a Mexican family, and studied Spanish at a local university. It was surprisingly easy to arrange. I used a search engine to look up "disabled abroad" and found that the University of Minnesota had an exchange program in Cuernavaca, Mexico. In fact they had hosted several students with disabilities. Immediately I emailed the school and asked them about access and a bunch of other necessary questions. A week later I booked my flight and called to tell my mother.

"You're not going to Mexico by yourself," she yelled at me through the phone. "Who will help you in the morning? How will you get around?"

Luckily I knew she would ask these very important questions and came armed with all the answers. "I hired the Mexican family's maid," I responded to her. "And I bought a travel wheelchair with an electric component."

She was upset and I knew that she would lose some sleep over it but I had to go. It was almost Christmas. I was leaving in two days.



The day I arrived in Mexico I was left curbside for 6 hours waiting for the school's bus to pick me up. I had two Spanish books with me and a cute Delta airline guy named Roberto to translate. I spoke no Spanish. Roberto cell phoned his boss from outside and told me that he could wait with me all day. He and I bonded with a long kiss goodbye.

Late that night I was dropped off at my host family's house. One hour later I realized that the next four weeks might be very hard. The bed was way too high for me to hop on, the shower had doors, and the in ground pool was

down four flights of stairs. On top of that the family was on vacation and the maid spoke no English.

The next day Taolita (the maid) and I were using our own form of sign language to communicate. I touched my foot to let her know I needed socks; instead she brought me my shoes. I pointed at my suitcase and she ran to get me a glass of water. I told her I wasn't hungry saying no want comida (food in Spanish) and she brought me fried beans and salsa. Soon, though, I learned that my dictionary would save me from eating beans. "No me gusta frijoles," I said while scrunching up my face. She understood! I was amazed that these simple words: no me gusta (I don't like) would keep me from having to eat fish with the eyeballs still attached, watching bad Mexican soap operas, or having the poodle jump on my bed to lick my face every morning. "No me gusta," I cried, pointing at the poodle, who eventually got a light sentence of sleeping outside.

Three weeks into my stay I was able to tell Taolita about losing my job, family, my love life, and about my disability-- all in Spanish. Though my vocabulary was limited, she understood and was patient in speaking slow so that I'd understand.

The University was very wheelchair accessible, but the course was hard. I spent five hours a day in class, with an instructor who only taught and answered me in Spanish. I became frustrated with my three-year-old vocabulary. I wanted fluency immediately but I also wanted to have long conversations in English. For this I called my family. They were surprised to hear from me, as if I'd gone to Mars and didn't have access to a telephone. "Oh, what do you want?," my sister asked sarcastically upon hearing my



voice. "I thought you were in Mexico." The one time my mother called me, she had a Spanish friend of my sister's drive over to her house

to translate in case I wasn't there.

The day before I left Mexico I realized how lucky I was to live in the United States when, trying to get on a bus, I needed to be lifted on by the driver. I appreciated his help and was so happy to be able to get on, but in the U.S. I have access to buses with lifts. I have elevators to take trains and get to stores. I have accessible taxis to go to far away places. I have curb cuts and wide doorways which help me to be independent.

Mexico was an adventure; I felt a great sense of autonomy going to a foreign country by myself. I learned a lot about

Mexican culture, negotiated the bed and shower, and I made many new friends. Next time though, I'm bringing a jar of peanut butter.

*When she's not planning her next foreign travel adventures, Erin Gullage designs web pages in Cambridge*

## Mobility International Offers Cross-Cultural Opportunities

If you have ever thought about combining travel with studies or volunteering abroad or participating in an international cross-cultural exchange program, now is your opportunity to receive a scholarship to help your dream become reality.



Mobility International USA (MIUSA) is a nonprofit organization dedicated since 1981 to expanding opportunities for people with disabilities in international exchange,

leadership and community service. Through MIUSA individuals with disabilities who live in the Greater Boston area or who are accepted into one of the participating international exchange programs may be eligible for a "World of Options" international exchange scholarship of \$250-500. Get out in the world and live your dream! Here is how it works:

- Apply to an international exchange program offered by one of the participating organizations, colleges or universities.
- Once you have been accepted, send a copy of your acceptance letter to MIUSA along with a completed application form and list of program costs you need to pay.
- MIUSA will review your request and, if approved, will send a check to the organization on your behalf to be used toward program fees, airfare or other costs that would ordinarily be your responsibility to pay to the program.
- The World of Options Scholarship may be matched by the sponsoring organization.

The list of participating organizations, colleges and universities is available on the MIUSA website at <[www.miusa.org](http://www.miusa.org)>. For more information or to get an application, visit the website or call Mobility International USA at 541-343-1284 (voice/TTY) or e-mail Pamela Houston at [pr@miusa.org](mailto:pr@miusa.org).

Since 1995 MIUSA has managed the National Clearinghouse on Disability and Exchange (NCDE), a project sponsored by the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs of the United States Department of State. NCDE provides free information and referrals to individuals about international exchange opportunities.

NCDE staff members are also available to provide consultation to individuals and organizations as they prepare for the exchange experience.

## Upcoming Events of Interest to the Disability Community

- May 5      **5<sup>th</sup> Annual Accessible Rail Trail Event** kicks off a weekly Accessible Cycling Program on the Norwottuck Rail Trail near Hadley, MA. It is an opportunity to ride and purchase a wide variety of bicycles, handcycles, and other wheeled contraptions designed for people of all abilities. The time is 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. and it is sponsored by the Universal Access Program Office of the Department of Environmental Management (DEM). For directions call Valley Bikes Trailside in Hadley at 413-584-4466. For more information call 413-545-5758 or 413-577-2222 TTY.
- May 8-9      **Community Access Monitor in Bellingham, MA.** . Learn how to help your community become more accessible by signing up for this workshop presented by the Massachusetts Office on Disability (MOD). Two-day program, 9 am – 4:30 pm, covers regulations of the Massachusetts Architectural Access Board (MAAB), the ADA Standards for Accessible Design and hands-on practice taking measurements during site surveys. Fee is \$15 for consumers, \$75 for professionals; lunch included both days. Registration DEADLINE is two weeks prior to the event if you are requesting accommodations (large print, Braille, sign language interpreters); otherwise it is one week. For more information, contact Bruce Bruneau at MOD, 617-727-7440 voice/TTY or 800-322-2020 voice/TTY. This is a scent free event; please do NOT wear perfume, after-shave, cologne, etc. This Training will be repeated around the state at various places:
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|-----------------|---------|----------------|---------|
| June 5-6        | Ludlow  | October 1-2    | Natick  |
| September (TBA) | Andover | November 13-14 | Roxbury |
- May 9      **CCPD Monthly Meeting** – 51 Inman Street, 2<sup>nd</sup> floor conference room, 5:30 –7:30 p.m. with opportunity for Public Comment.
- May 9      **PAC (Parents' Advisory Council) General Meeting** at Cambridge Rindge and Latin School Library, 459 Broadway in Cambridge, 7-9 p.m. The PAC is a volunteer-run parent support and advocacy group focusing on issues of concern to special needs students in the Cambridge Public Schools. For information call PAC co-chair Jim Monteverde at 617-686-8369 or Office of Special Education (OSE) Family Liaison, Marcia Kirssin-Duran at 617-349-6424 or e-mail [marcia\\_duran@cps.ci.cambridge.ma.us](mailto:marcia_duran@cps.ci.cambridge.ma.us).
- May 9      **Stroke Support Group** at the Cambridge Citywide Senior Center, 806 Massachusetts Ave. in Cambridge, 6-7:30 p.m. For more information contact Melissa Terrien at 800--922-8290, x343.
- May 9      **The ABCs of Social Skills and Children with Special Needs**, a seminar presented by Special Needs Services Department of the Jewish Community Centers of Greater Boston. The meeting will be at Leventhal-Sidman Jewish Community Center, 333 Nahanton Street in Newton, 7:30-9:30 p.m. Registration is \$5 for JCC members, \$10 for others. For more information contact Judy Pearl at 617-558-6508 or [jpearl@jccgh.org](mailto:jpearl@jccgh.org).
- May 14 **Finding and Interviewing Job Candidates with Disabilities**, a FREE workshop for employers hosted by the Cambridge Commission for Persons with Disabilities and WorkTech solutions and generously sponsored by MIT. Check-in and breakfast at 8:30 a.m.; workshop 9 - 11:30 a.m. Due to space limitations pre-registration is required; see article on front page of this newsletter for details.

- May 14 **Boston Voice Users** is a group for people who use speech recognition or dictation software that meets the second Tuesday of each month at MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) in Building 2, Room 143. There is often a guest speaker. Meeting time is 7:30 -9:30 p.m. Go to their webpage at <http://harvee.billerica.ma.us/mailman/listinfo/boston-voice-users> and click on Boston-voice-users Archives to find out more about meetings and discussions.
- May 15 **Women Maximizing Abilities Now**, peer support group for women with physical or emotional disabilities and/or chronic conditions meets at The Women's Center, 46 Pleasant St., Cambridge, 2-3:30 p.m. on the 1st and 3rd Wednesdays of each month. Wheelchair accessible; contact Mary Quinn at 617-354-8807 or [woman@braintrust.org](mailto:woman@braintrust.org) for more information.
- May 15 **Effective Inclusion of Students with Disabilities in the MCAS Testing System** is an evening workshop for parents sponsored by Federation for Children with Special Needs. It covers accommodations available to students with disabilities taking the standard paper and pencil version of MCAS as well as information on the MCAS Alternate Assessment. In Medway, 7 -9 p.m. Call 800-331-0688 for details and registration.
- May 16 **Networking Breakfast with Houseworks and the Boston Alzheimer's Center**, at the Center, 434 Jamaicaaway, Boston from 9 to 10:30 a.m. To RSVP or get more information, contact Cindy DiMartino at 617-928-1010 or Jenny Weiner at 617-983-2300.
- May 21 **Supervising Employees with Disabilities: Productive Management Strategies and Tools for all Staff** is a FREE workshop for employers hosted by the Cambridge Commission for Persons with Disabilities and WorkTech solutions and generously sponsored by MIT. Breakfast at 8:30 a.m.; workshop 9 - 11:30 a.m. Due to space limitations pre-registration is required; see article on front page of this newsletter for details.
- May 21 **Disability Policy Consortium (DPC)** monthly meeting, 1-3 p.m. at the State House, Room A-1, Boston. For more information call Robert Snierison, Chair, at 617-338-6665 voice / 338-6662 TTY or Mary Lou Maloney at 617-216-5181.
- May 22 **Access Advisory Committee to the MBTA** 1:00 - 3:30 p.m. at State Transportation Building, 10 Park Plaza, Boston, Conference Room 4. Call 617-973-7507 voice, or 617-973-7089 TTY for more information or to request interpreters. For problems with The RIDE service, call 617-222-5123 voice, or 617-222-5415 TTY.
- June 1 **Accessible Trails Equipment Demo at Bradley Palmer State Park**, Topsfield, MA from 11am to 4pm. Quickie Shadow Handcycles, Terra Trek Wheelchairs, and related equipment used for statewide programs will be on display and available for trial use. Opening ceremony of a newly constructed accessible trail in the park will also take place. For more information contact Marcy Marchello, Universal Access Program Coordinator for the Department of Environmental Management at 413-545-5758 Voice/TTY or [Marcy.Marchello@state.ma.us](mailto:Marcy.Marchello@state.ma.us)
- June 3 **Individualized Educational Program (IEP)**, an evening workshop for parents sponsored by Federation for Children with Special Needs. Includes overview of new IEP with emphasis on IDEA 97, access to the general curriculum, writing curriculum-based measurable annual goals, and the state's new special education regulations. In Boston, 6:30 - 8:30 p.m. Call 800-331-0688 for details and registration.
- June 4 **Making Sense of Social Security** is a one-day workshop presented by Institute for Community Inclusion on the often confusing Social Security disability system. Through a variety of exercises and case studies, trainees will learn about the differences between SSI and SSDI, how employment affects benefits, the use of work incentives including Impairment Related Work Expenses (IRWE) and Plans for Achieving Self-Support (PASS), and how to advocate with the Social Security system. Changes resulting from the new

Ticket to Work program will be integrated into this session. The workshop will be from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. at Holy Cross in Worcester. The registration DEADLINE is May 13; the fee is \$75. For more information contact Mandy Gehrig at 617-355-5371 voice, 617-355-6956 TTY, or amanda.gehrig@tch.harvard.edu.

June 5            **Repetitive Strain Injury (RSI) Drop-in group** (information & support) on first Wednesday of each month, 6-8 p.m. at Barnes & Noble Bookstore, 5<sup>th</sup> floor conference room, Kenmore Square in Boston. Call 617-247-6827 for information.

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## Access Notice

The City of Cambridge does not discriminate on the basis of disability. This newsletter is available in electronic mail, large print and other alternative formats upon request. To add your name to our mailing list, to inquire about alternative formats, or for information about other auxiliary aids and services or reasonable modifications in policies and procedures, contact CCPD.

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### Commission for Persons with Disabilities

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ACCESS**Letter** is produced by the Cambridge Commission for Persons with Disabilities,  
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We welcome your comments, criticisms, and suggestions. Write us!

Read past issues on our website: [www.ci.cambridge.ma.us/~CCPD](http://www.ci.cambridge.ma.us/~CCPD)

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